

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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Smoking and Fire Deaths

Cigarette smoking has been called the nation's leading preventable cause of death, accounting for more than 300,000 premature deaths from cancer and other diseases, according to the U.S. Surgeon General. What is less known, is cigarettes are responsible for more fire deaths than any other fire source, both nationally and within Washington State.

Although one of the less frequent causes of fires, when smoking fires do occur they are the most deadly.

- Tragically, in 2007 Washington State fire departments reported 9 smoking related fire deaths.

Many smoking fires originate in the bedroom, late in the night when the victims are sleeping. More often than not, the victims were involved with starting the fire itself.

Smoking fires, like residential structure fires overall, occur predominately in one- and two-family homes. One- and two-family homes along with multifamily dwellings, such as apartments, account for over 89% of smoking fire related deaths in 2007.

One human factor that contributes most to the occurrence of smoking fires is falling asleep. Where a human factor was reported as contributing to the ignition, the majority of all lighted tobacco fires were caused when the smoker fell asleep. Unattended or unsupervised individuals and alcohol and other substance abuse play important roles in smoking fires as well.

National Findings:

- Approximately 4% of all residential fires nationally were reportedly caused by smoking materials, however approximately 18% of residential fire deaths were attributed to smoking materials.
- Fatality rates due to smoking are nearly four times higher than the overall residential fire rate; with injuries being more than twice as likely.
- Forty percent of all smoking fires start in the bedroom or living room/family room; in 35% of these fires, bedding or upholstered furniture were the items first ignited.
- Smoking fire fatalities spike in the early morning hours when victims are asleep.

Remember some of these tips could save your life:

- Be alert. Don't smoke during times when you are tired or have been consuming alcohol or other substances or medications.
- Put your cigarette or cigar out at the first sign of feeling drowsy.

- Never smoke in bed.
- Use deep ashtrays and put your cigarette or cigar all the way out.
- Don't place ashtrays on the arms of sofas or chairs and never leave lit cigarettes unattended.
- Ensure your home has working smoke alarms installed on every level and test them monthly; replacing batteries annually.

PREVENT FIRES
IT'S YOUR JOB!

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State including inspections of state licensed facilities, plan review of fire protection systems and school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data. For additional information you may visit our web page at wsp.wa.gov and then click on State Fire Marshal.

For more information on smoking related deaths and injuries contact you local fire department, or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0400, or to view national statistics concerning this topic, please visit www.usfa.fema.gov.

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